IMMERSIVE SPACES

A Key Study to Envision Immersive Content in the US

A study by Garage Stories for Villa Albertine

GARAGE STORIES

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Challenges and opportunities for the distribution of Location-Based Entertainment, French immersive content in the US

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SUMMARY

IMMERSIVE SPACES is a new program proposed by the French Institute of the United States–Villa Albertine dedicated to promoting and exporting French artworks through immersive experiences in virtual reality, augmented reality, and other forms of emerging media.

Much like how virtual creation lies at the crossroads between film, gaming, visual arts, and performing arts, traditional spaces where these creations used to be exhibited are also being transformed and merged. New venues and possibilities for temporary exhibitions and installations are emerging all over.

This research aims to highlight the different venues showcasing XR in the US and the exhibitor network operating in them to facilitate its access to French producers and distributors. France has a strong reputation for innovation and cultural heritage that can be successfully adapted in the US, where there is a relevant concentration of technology companies, LBEs, and museums.

Garage Stories and Villa Albertine, with the support of Villa Albertine, Ambassade de France, FACE Foundation, and Institut français have created an INTERACTIVE MAP with the most relevant agents and venues playing critical roles in the growing network of XR distribution to help navigate the US's emerging XR ecosystem and strengthen their support to French producers and distributors of immersive content and museums.

As a result of this research and interviews with French and US producers, cultural institutions, and distributors, significant challenges that the XR industry currently faces have been identified, and new market trends and opportunities gathered. A practical guide to facilitate access to the US industry has also been established.

INTRODUCTION

Distribution is one of the most significant challenges facing the XR industry. There is no mass XR market yet, and high production costs and a reluctance to embrace it in more traditional cultural institutions still make its accessibility and diffusion challenging, despite its ever-increasing expansion and demand.

The number of spaces in US cities now able to host immersive experiences (offices, sheds, domes, industrial wastelands, factories, and shopping malls) beyond traditional exhibition locations (museums, galleries, and theaters) is growing, alongside a rising number of operators producing these immersive experiences. The US offers a wide range of possibilities for XR producers to expand with its high concentration of technology companies and investors and large audience passionate about entertainment.

France is one of the leading countries in cultural production and innovation. It is also a leader in promoting public access to its rich heritage thanks to its comprehensive public funding system in the cultural and social fields. Currently, most French creators and distributors are well-identified and respected internationally for their high artistic quality and legacies. But their distribution network remains limited and requires support.

Although many distributors have managed to position themselves in the most prestigious US festivals and are actively collaborating with different US actors, it is difficult for them to access the US industry (immersive venues, museums, galleries, etc.), particularly the exhibitor network. This study aims to build new bridges and create opportunities to develop a new model for the French immersive industry adapted to the United States and its market.

METHODOLOGY

Between September and December 2022, our research team scouted venues that regularly or occasionally host immersive exhibitions based in the cities where Villa Albertine has its residency programs (Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, New Orleans, Miami, Washington, DC, Boston, Chicago, Houston, and Atlanta) and surveyed 30 venues.

NEW ORLEANS,
MIAMI,
WASHINGTON, DC,
BOSTON,
CHICAGO,
HOUSTON,
AND ATLANTA
were surveyed totalling 30 venues.

21 interviews were conducted with leading XR producers, cultural institutions, distributors, and exhibitors in France and the US.

Most respondents focused their activities on showcasing and exhibiting a collection of XR works (15), followed by respondents that focused their activities on production (12) and those that concentrated on distribution and circulation activities (5).

RESULTS

From the information contributed, the XR industry's main challenges, needs, trends, and opportunities were identified, as well as the relevance of the following map highlighting the current primary network operating in the US.

Different emerging and traditional US venues where XR may be exhibited have been analyzed, cataloged, and located, together with a list of exhibitors and XR studios. Additionally, a catalog of the latest major XR creations of the most relevant French production companies ready to be exhibited is provided.
We sincerely hope that new alliances and a solid distribution network between France and the US will arise from this joint study and the ultimate US XR ecosystem map.

I.
DESIGNING A NEW MARKET FOR FRENCH IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES IN THE US

MAP METHODOLOGY

Based on the cities where Villa Albertine has its residency programs (Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, New Orleans, Miami, Washington, DC, Boston, Chicago, Houston, and Atlanta), we looked for venues that regularly or occasionally host immersive exhibitions, as well as those spaces that can host XR on a rental basis.

The search was extended to other influential areas and cities involved with XR in the US ecosystem, such as Arizona, Las Vegas, Denver, and Dallas.

Once the venues were mapped, they were contacted and sent a questionnaire to gather information about their business models, desired content, and other relevant questions. We also organized a few in-person interviews to understand their interests and needs more thoroughly.

At the same time, based on the chief locations, exhibits, and XR studios, we scouted and contacted exhibitors operating as key intermediaries for XR distribution.

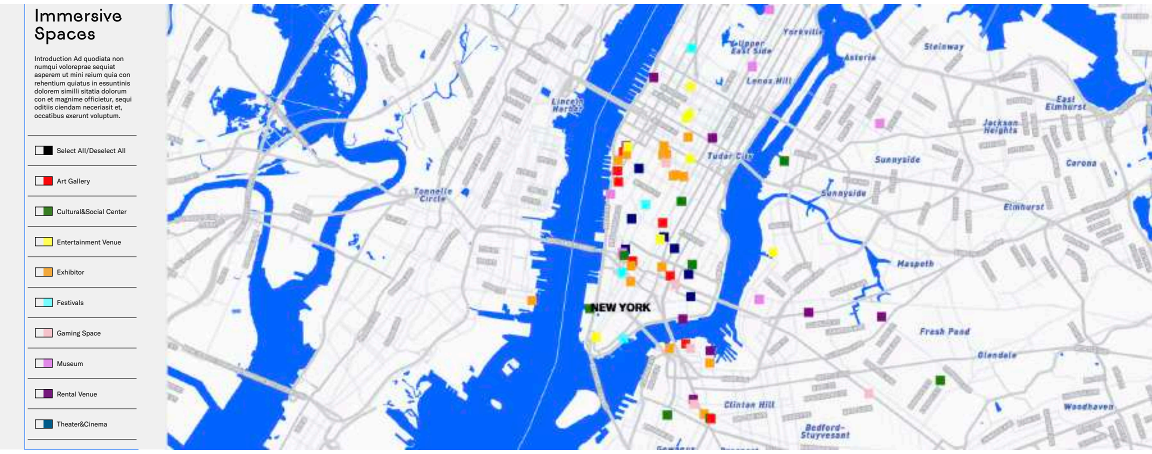
Given the importance of festivals for exhibition and distribution, we also included the most relevant US festivals showcasing XR in the map.

310 VENUES
53 EXHIBITORS
23 FESTIVALS

INTERACTIVE MAP

MAP CONTENT: 310 VENUES, 53 EXHIBITORS, 23 FESTIVALS

YOU CAN SELECT CATEGORIES INDIVIDUALLY,
OR SELECT ALL IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN A SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHIC AREA.



CLICK ON A SPECIFIC POINT TO VIEW ALL THE RELEVANT INFORMATION,
SUCH AS PAST EXHIBITIONS, CAPACITY, AND CONTACT INFORMATION.

ANALYSIS

New exhibition spaces have emerged beyond traditional exhibition locations, which still show some reluctance to independent XR. This expansion can be credited to the explosion of pop-ups, growing hybridization with NFTs and the consolidation of the metaverse, and increasing technological advances enabling the display of XR practically anywhere.

Although we have delineated the different spaces into specific categories, as our research progressed, we noticed how these categories did not nuance their complexity.

Spaces are becoming increasingly multifunctional and mobile. New collaborations between entertainment and educational fields go beyond the limitations of institutionally regulated locations. These projects have fostered the emergence of many spaces that can host immersive experiences on a rental basis, as well as many XR production studios and exhibitors with their own facilities.

Following our research, we identified and categorized US venues hosting XR experiences, which are defined with examples below:

	Art Galleries
	Cultural & Social Centers
	Entertainment Venues (LARGE-SCALE IMMERSIVE INSTALLATIONS, DOMES, LIGHT INSTALLATIONS, POP-UP MUSEUMS, AND INTERACTIVE MUSEUMS)
	Exhibitor
	Festivals
	Gaming Spaces (MULTI-USER VR EXPERIENCES, ESCAPE ROOMS
	Museums (ART MUSEUMS, SCIENCE MUSEUMS, AND PLANETARIUMS)
	Rental Venues (STUDIOS, CONVENTION CENTERS, WAREHOUSES, SHEDS, LOCATION OFFICES, INDUSTRIAL WASTELANDS, FACTORIES, AND SHOPPING MALLS)
	Theaters and Cinemas

MUSEUMS

The official definition of a museum (as established by the ICOM — International Council of Museums) is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. XR offers the possibility to engage and amaze new audiences by presenting heritage interactively. However, most XR artworks found in museums are part of temporary exhibitions or are co-productions of their own collections. Independent XR artworks are rarely embraced, as difficulties remain in adapting a museum's business model to the operations of XR experiences — and in their reluctance to provide dedicated spaces for the exhibition of these artworks.

The museums that most welcome XR artworks are, with some examples noted:

Scientific Museums, Natural History Museums, and Planetariums:

These are the only museum institutions that have been open for many years to hosting XR experiences and that have long since addressed the issues related to using digital technologies. Some examples are the Museum of Science in Boston, the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, and the Adler Planetarium in Chicago.

Art Museums (particularly Museums of Contemporary Art):

Many art museums present XR experiences as "artworks" more than learning experiences or XR exhibitions about a specific topic, especially when disconnected from their traditional exhibition programming or the collection they present. Some examples are the New Museum of New York or The Broad in Los Angeles.

Art Galleries:

Art galleries are privatively operated spaces open to the public whose primary activity is exhibiting and trading artworks and stimulating the creation and promotion of art, artists, and their works. These cultural institutions are also adapting their facilities and developing hybrid business models for exhibiting, advertising, and selling XR and digital artworks. Some classical galleries are slowly embracing XR, such as Pace in New York City and Hauser & Wirth in Los Angeles. Most notably, some others are partially or exclusively showcasing NFT, including Postmasters, Bitforms, and Vellum in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco.

Cultural & Social Centers:

These include spaces for the experimentation, creation, and exhibition of XR artworks with a strong sense of local community offering creative residencies, labs, and exhibition spaces, such as 3LD and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York.

continued

Gaming Spaces:

In the past, arcades were filled with specialist gamers. But today, a diverse assortment of audiences frequent these leisure spaces as groups or couples to play and experiment with XR. The most popular are:

Multi-user VR experiences including VR World NYC and Key to Amaze VR in Boston.
Escape rooms including Escape Virtuality in New York City and Dreamscape Immersive in Los Angeles.

Theaters & Cinemas:

Performative and audiovisual arts stand out for their constant willingness to approach reality in unique and personal ways. Beyond 3D cinema, various spaces exhibit XR films to diverse audiences, from traditional big chains like the AMC network to smaller theaters such as the Yosemite Cinema. Similarly, more and more theaters are programming XR pieces that are revolutionizing audience interaction, such as the Globe in Los Angeles and the Tennessee Williams Theatre Company of New Orleans.

Rental Venues (Empty/Retail):

These include spaces designed or adapted for rentals used for exhibiting temporary or traveling exhibitions, such as the popular *Immersive Van Gogh*. Those that stand out most are **production studios** (such as Whitfield Entertainment Group Studios in Washington, DC and Silver Street Studios in Houston), **convention centers** (such as in Portland, Oregon and Miami Beach), **warehouses** (such as Pullman Yards in Atlanta and SoWa in Boston), and **stores/shopping malls** (such as Sugar Land Town Square outside of Houston, Texas).

Entertainment Venues:

Beyond traditional exhibition venues and various spaces operating on a rental basis for temporary exhibitions, the most common places to experience XR are entertainment venues dedicated exclusively to exhibiting and promoting immersive experiences. These venues perform the same functions as cultural institutions regarding programming and exhibition but, notably, operate as cultural entertainment companies. These facilities are fully equipped to exhibit XR artworks, and maintain one or more expositions temporarily or permanently. Additionally, most of these spaces function as production companies for their own content, but they also commission artworks from other artists and studios. Although it is a fledgling ecosystem, large immersive art companies have emerged, such as Lighthouse Immersive and Meow Wolf (which have their own exhibition spaces, but also collaborate with other operators) — as have complex buildings, such as AREA15 in Las Vegas and Superblue Miami. Some initiatives have been replicated in multiple cities, such as ARTECHOUSE in New York City, Washington, DC, and Miami Beach. Others are now anchored in specific cities, such as Seismique in Houston.
Among **large-scale immersive installations**, we also studied **light installations**, such as Art on theMART in Chicago, increasingly popular domes such as Wisdome LA in Los Angeles, and spaces considered **interactive museums** or **pop-up museums**, such as the Color Factory Museum in Houston and the Museum of Illusions.

REPORT

In an ever-changing world where hybridity is becoming more and more prevalent and traditional spaces are becoming continuously more blurred, creating a map based on specific locations and categories has not been easy.

As an emerging ecosystem that lies at the crossroads between film, gaming, and visual and performing arts, some XR exhibitions still occur in traditional exhibition venues, such as **Museums, Art Galleries, Theaters & Cinemas, Cultural & Art Centers, and Gaming Spaces**, which have chosen to adapt their installations and business models to the new art form.

However, as mentioned above, most immersive experiences are exhibited in large-scale immersive installations, referred to as **Entertainment Venues**, which perform the functions of traditional exhibition spaces but (in most cases) also produce their own XR artworks.

Likewise, technological advances allowing XR to be displayed almost anywhere, the pop-up phenomenon, and the increasing number of traveling labs, festivals, and shows increasingly encourage the emergence of new spaces for temporary exhibits on a rental basis, referred to as **Rental Spaces.**

Thus, regarding immersive spaces and distribution opportunities, it is worth mentioning the increased willingness of **Entertainment Venues** and **Rental Spaces** to exhibit independent XR artworks. This is unlike more traditional exhibition venues, which still present some difficulties in fully embracing independent XR artworks, apart from their own collections or commissioned content.

LOCATION-BASED ENTERTAINMENT VENUES

TRADITIONALLY

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERIES, CULTURAL & ART CENTERS, THEATERS & CINEMAS, AND GAMING SPACES

EMERGING

ENTERTAINMENT VENUES, RETAIL VENUES, AND EMPTY SPACES

MOST DESIRED CONTENT

More and more US venues and producers are seeking immersive experiences with quality content. Although most rely on their contacts' community network, they spend a lot of time researching new content through social media, platforms, conferences, etc. Sometimes they even make new connections through direct

Typically, they mainly exhibit:

Blockbuster-related experiences, such as *Stranger Things: The Experience* and *The FRIENDS™ Experience*

Art masterpieces transformed into commercial shows like the Van Gogh and Frida Kahlo exhibits

Multiplayer games like VR escape rooms and VR games like *Mission: Galaxy Rescue* in Escape Virtuality in NYC

Nature-related content showcasing alternative worlds, such as *THE INFINITE* experience and *Hidden Worlds* in Miami

Original marketing campaigns for brand activations including Louis Vuitton and Ferrari

However, there is an increasing interest in some topics where French content could find its opportunity:

SDG-related content that shows the growing awareness of social and environmental issues, such as the exhibitions *Atlas of a Changing Earth* and *Arcadia Earth* in New York

Revelatory content at the intersection of science and education, such as the exhibitions *Life of a Neuron* at ARTECHOUSE and *HOOKED: When Want Becomes Need* at Science Gallery in Atlanta

Cultural heritage performances, such as *Beyond King Tut: The Immersive Experience* and *Yosemite VR*

Innovative creations for tourist attractions, such as those designed for rooftops like *SUMMIT One Vanderbilt* in New York City and the CEB Tower in Washington, DC

Mental health-related content, such as artworks presented in the *Whitney Biennial*

continued

Large-scale public installations such as *LUMINEX* in Los Angeles and *Times Square Arts* in New York City

AR creations to engage the public to participate in museums and public spaces, such as New Museum's *[AR]T* project in collaboration with Apple in New York and LACMA's project *Monumental Perspectives* in collaboration with Snapchat in Los Angeles

Immersive and interactive experiences, such as theater and dance performances like *The Nest* in Los Angeles, new formats that experiment with the body and senses like Superblue Miami, or events like yoga in the *Immersive Van Gogh* exhibit

MOST DESIRED CONTENT

TRADITIONALLY

- BLOCKBUSTER-RELATED EXPERIENCES
- ART MASTERPIECES
- MULTIPLAYER GAMES
- MARKETING CAMPAIGNS
- NATURE-RELATED CONTENT

EMERGING

- SDG-RELATED CONTENT
- CULTURAL HERITAGE PERFORMANCES
- INNOVATIVE CREATIONS FOR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS
- MENTAL HEALTH-RELATED CONTENT
- LARGE-SCALE PUBLIC INSTALLATIONS
- AR CREATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT
- IMMERSIVE & INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES

MOST DESIRED FORMAT

- MULTIPLAYER INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES
- IMMERSIVE THEATER, OPERA, AND DANCE EXPERIENCES
- VR USING CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY
- IMMERSIVE EXHIBITS
- AR
- DIGITAL ARTWORKS

BUSINESS MODELS

The US market mainly relies on private financing, and therefore sees entertainment and cultural creation as business opportunities.

As there is no mass XR market yet, we outlined the most common LBE business models identified in our study, which are ranked below:

1. Revenue share
2. Commissioned content/B2B
3. License fee/Artistic fee
4. Venue rental and split of ticket sales

Despite operating in a private market, foundations, art institutions, and museums frequently offer residencies and open calls for submissions where artists receive a fixed amount for the development and production of their piece, which is ultimately exhibited. Such is the case for Art on theMART in Chicago, the largest permanent digital art projection in the world, or Seismique, an interactive museum in Houston. Another critical factor to consider is that some exhibition spaces work with artists permanently, and others work temporarily on commission.

Despite its artistic circuits and public applications, it is vital to consider the open disposition (in most cases) to exhibit and test innovative models and proposals.

"We have both full-time and contract creators on staff and sometimes partner with other creative organizations for special events."
— Eric Jaenike, President, Prismajic

"Depending on funding sources, we generally do a venue rental and a split of ticket sales. If we are funding the experience, we make sure the artists pay themselves appropriately, and then, once our initial investment is paid off, we split ticket sales."
— Tammy Greenman, Co-Founder and Director of Strategic Creativity, Factory Obscura/ Mix-Tape

"We are open to hosting semi-permanent rotating installations at our space. Funding and monetization are always challenging. But ideally, this would be presented as an art series with monthly or bi-weekly events unveiling new names. [...] I can also see producing unique night events dedicated to a particular product, cause, or an artist."
— Leo Tsimmer, CEO, VR World NYC

MOST COMMON CHALLENGES

Because it is a private market, the most common challenge is providing space for emerging creators to work on independent projects.

There is an enormous demand for blockbuster content extensions in new mediums like *Stranger Things: The Experience* (coproduced by Netflix and Fever), which are typically accompanied by large-scale marketing campaigns.

Given the high visual weight of XR experiences, form usually prevails over the content. As such, large companies with the latest technological developments have an advantage over artists addressing critical issues with fewer resources. There is also a feeling that traditional institutions and art spaces still need to be made aware of XR's potential and new possibilities, and its accessibility to all audiences.

"LBE immersive experiences are still not quite embraced by the art world, especially museums, so I would love to help change that."
— Julie Ganas, Curator, Engagement and New Initiatives, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

"XR and LBE are growing, but to get to the mainstream, it will need a serious push of awareness. Many people think it does not work or is for kids. They don't realize the power of immersion that VR and XR can bring to many experiences."
— William Ferraro, CEO, Key To Amaze

II. AN EXPANDING FRENCH ECOSYSTEM

France has always been a pioneer country when it comes to culture. It has dedicated resources to the education and promotion of its talents, allowing for the emergence of many internationally acclaimed artists.

The new media industry has not been an exception to the rule. On the contrary, it has had quite a few breakthroughs and acclaimed pieces that have become known and respected in many countries.

According to a study by Unifrance, revenues and sales numbers of French immersive works abroad (€1.11 million and 266, respectively) have continuously increased. In 2021, these figures reached the highest levels since these studies were conducted in 2009 and 2017.

Looking at the numbers, we can see how France is a leading country in content production, and the US is a leading country in investment. Therefore, there's a great opportunity that should not be overlooked.

EXPORTS

- €1,107,641 in revenues, 266 sales, and 41 titles sold
- 115 buyers, of which Oculus (United States) was the leader
- Animation represented over half of the total exports.
- Gloomy Eyes achieved the best revenue and sales performance.
- North America (€0.64 million) and the United States (€0.62 million) were the leading geographical region and the country with the highest revenues, respectively.

AT FESTIVALS

- 31 French immersive works selected, with 62 presentations at 21 international festivals.
- 7 awards received.
- Goliath: Playing With Reality received the most awards.

Source: https://en.unifrance.org/news/16456/2021-results-for-french-short-films-and-immersive-works-for-export-and-in-international-festivals

IMMERSIVE SPACES IN FRANCE

The most common venues are, with examples of XR experiences and immersive exhibitions showcased in which the interviewees have exhibited:

- **Art Galleries** — *FRAGMENT* at Nikki Diana Marquardt Gallery
- **Museums** — *VersaillesVR: the Palace is Yours* at the Palace of Versailles and *Mona Lisa: Beyond the Glass* at the Louvre Museum
- **Entertainment Venues** — *Kandinsky: The Odyssey of Abstraction* at the Atelier des Lumières in Paris
- **Retail Venues** — *The Mona Lisa Immersive Exhibition* at the Palais de la Bourse in Marseille
- **Theaters** — *Le Bal de Paris* at the Théâtre National de Chaillot in Paris
- **Cultural and Art Centers** — *Les Aveugles* at Stereolux in Nantes and *Endodrome* at LUMA Arles
- **Media Libraries** — E.g., the François-Mitterrand Library and its virtual reality documents

Additionally, festivals continue to be one of the most successful platforms to showcase new pieces and later find venues and partners to distribute content on a larger scale.

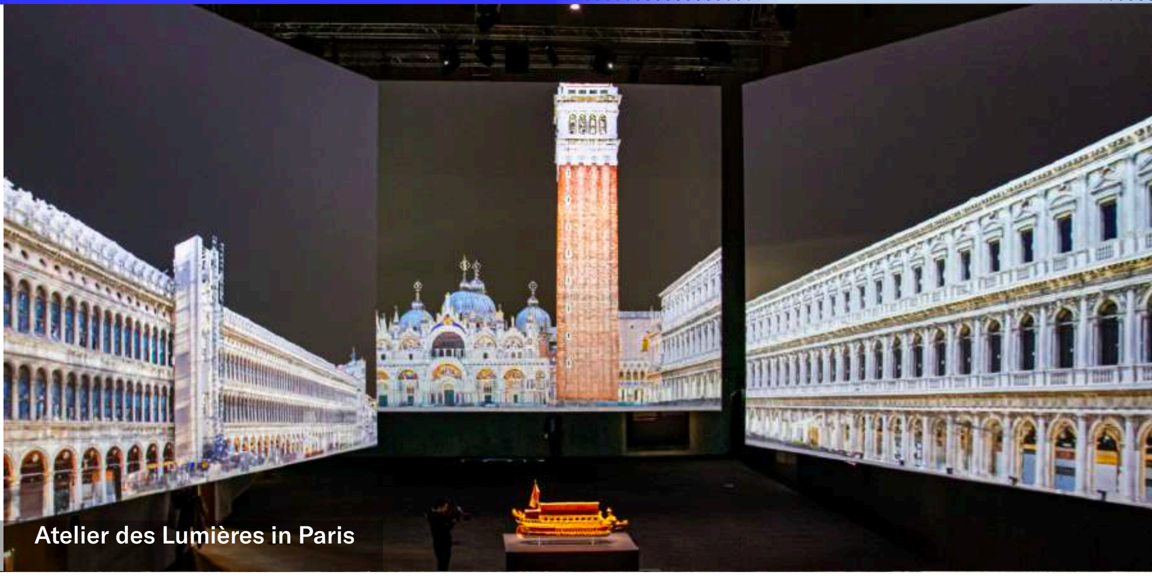
Major French and US festivals where they have showcased include:

FRANCE

- Cannes XR
- NewImages Festival
- Biennale Némo
- Annecy International Animation Film Festival
- Festival Avignon
- Biennale de la danse
- VR Arles
- Festival Séries Mania
- Recto VRso Festival (Laval Virtual)

US

- SXSW
- Tribeca Film Festival
- Sundance Film Festival
- Art Basel Miami


Atelier des Lumières in Paris


Emissive Kheops


Cannes XR Film Festival

CURRENT DISTRIBUTION MODELS

Currently, most productions are financed by public funding and co-productions. But they must be complemented with a business model, especially to cover distribution and marketing efforts. The most common are:

Revenue Share (with the venue or a distribution partner) They usually take care of the creative process and the venue or partner from the marketing and logistical aspects. It is a common practice to ask the venue for a minimum guarantee to cover costs.

License Fee/Artistic Fee
The venue acquires the right to showcase its content for a fee for a predetermined amount of time or is hired for a one-time gig/show.

B2B/Commissioned content
A client approaches them to request a specific project, and they produce it on demand.

Ticketing
This situation is rarer, but sometimes they rent a venue and keep 100% of the profits from tickets sold.

Beyond traditional business models, new forms of collaborative distribution are emerging. One such example is Galaxy Network, an international community of art institutions coordinated by Diversion Cinema, a French company. Galaxy Network is united by a common goal: to showcase and promote high-quality VR content to larger audiences in its national markets.

Most French producers and distributors prefer a flat fee model or a minimum guarantee for revenue share to ensure the operation's viability.

We are interested in joint ventures with ticketing % back: we handle all the creative content and design, and the other partner handles the day-to-day operations, production, and marketing." — Juliette Buffard Scalabre, Head of Communications & Art Development, Superbien

"Our preferred way of working is to receive a fee for the presentation of our work and leave ticket revenue to the exhibitors." — Ornella Salloum, Producer, AΦE

An interesting approach taken by the French VR studio Emissive was to organize a B2B demo in New York because their experiences are quite particular. Most of them, such as KHUFU VR, require large spaces (minimum of 700 square feet) where audiences can roam freely.

They need their projects to be experienced firsthand. This is why they organized the event in collaboration with Hop We Care and Beekman Reim. This collaboration helped them establish many local contacts to bring new projects to life with a better and deeper understanding of the American market.

We don't need to be touring; we can be in many locations simultaneously. What we are looking to create is to have venues dedicated to our content. Museums and cultural spaces are compelling but not where we fit best because they have limited spaces and availability. They also want to operate long-term. We have never seen our content get old. On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly popular."
– Raphaël Lemme, Head of Marketing and Sales, Emissive

INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

The current most common challenge is **distribution**: most production companies must sell and distribute content themselves.

This task is highly time- and resource-consuming. Because there is not yet a broad network of distributors and many of the companies involved in distribution produce content themselves, production companies must strengthen their alliances with international distributors.

France allocates resources to support distribution to various cultural agents, such as the French Institute (which it supports with an annual digital catalog where they can submit their projects) and various delegations abroad that support international collaborations and residencies, such as Villa Albertine.

Creators may need to consider cultural differences when it comes to challenges accessing the US market, as the language and the value proposition must be adapted for different audiences.

Although festivals are great places to build networks and gain visibility, they don't guarantee that an audience will be reached — which is the main objective for most creators and producers, and the primary goal of this program.

Additionally, most French producers, distributors, and museums have never even been introduced to American exhibitors or venues. It is therefore harder for them to navigate the ecosystem.

Other challenges facing the XR industry include:

Marketing: Because it is a new media constantly pushing the traditional fields, sometimes it is difficult to tell audiences what to expect. This phenomenon makes the curatorial transaction and advertising campaign to the general public more challenging. And because of its newness, one should not underestimate an exhibited piece's word-of-mouth potential.

Technology: The XR industry is a leading field of technological exploration and innovation, but this creates the additional difficulty of having to constantly update various hardware, headsets, and metrics. Typically, artworks need to be remastered and geolocated standards need to be modified, which increases the final costs of production. Moreover, although wireless devices and new hardware are continually being developed, in many cases, one must carry their own equipment — or buy new equipment, in the US — which increases the cost of touring and makes logistical distribution challenging.

Segmentation: There is also a perception that festival categories do not yet account for different hybridizations between traditional artistic fields (film, gaming, visual and performing arts, etc.).

NEEDS AND DESIRES

Most The leaders of well-established French museums and cultural heritage institutions are continuously more committed to exploring innovative forms to share knowledge and amaze audiences.

Some of their most relevant wishes to make this goal more attainable are:

A strategic editorial line that engages US exhibitors to present French content.

A solid distributor network where they could regularly send their new creations.

Partnerships and alliances with key local actors (labs, universities, museums, exhibitors, etc.).

To share their knowledge and research with relevant educational institutions and run workshops or take part in labs.

Make a tour strategy for distributing their works, to optimize travel and reduce costs and environmental impact.

More opportunities to engage in co-productions with US agencies and professionals.

A balanced business model in which they create a licensed local team that could take charge of the production and distribution of their works.

"We are polyvalent: we can both show a very good project but also talk about its concept and do workshops with local teams."
— Line Abramatic-Brucena, Producer, Gengiskhan

NEW EXPERIMENTATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS WITH MUSEUMS

The leaders of well-established French museums and cultural heritage institutions are continuously more committed to exploring innovative forms to share knowledge and amaze audiences.

Many of them have made exceptional efforts in digitizing their collections and providing online content, especially since the impact of the pandemic. They are also leading the development of new interactive ways of learning about heritage, such as interactive exhibitions and XR experiences.

Nonetheless, XR makes it possible to approach heritage more broadly and transfer its content to new spaces and temporalities. Although its primary function is to preserve and attract new audiences to its monuments and collections at a local level, more and more institutions are seeking to co-produce and export their content internationally to attract new audiences and promote their content.

As immersive experience production is a new enterprise for museums and cultural institutions, most do not yet have their own production team and, therefore, need to co-produce with other production companies to create and distribute their works.

Despite promoting and playing an active role in producing XR content, most cultural institutions and museums are not yet part of the distribution circuit. They seek to solidify their position within the emerging ecosystem, as XR content production and distribution also represents an economic opportunity for the future viability of those institutions.

The partners they are looking for are varied: from more traditional or classical cultural venues to co-produce with (museums or cultural centers — even though for these partnerships there is a much more prolonged period of programming, reflection, and preparation), to US distributors and other types of venues that might be interested in the content they can provide.

French museums generally receive a lot of interest from US visitors, and they are sure their content would be very successful in the US. But their main challenge is to find reliable partners to make distribution viable.

“Although our main focus relies on local visitors, we would also love to reach more international audiences.”
— Abla Benmiloud-Faucher, Head of Strategy and Digital, Centre des Monuments Nationaux

“Institutions have a key role in XR distribution that they are not playing at the moment. [...] I believe in the capacity and ability to co-create with my counterparts in other natural history museums because the story we tell is the history of Nature, which is universal.” — Stéphanie Targui, Digital Innovation Manager, Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle

“Our main challenge is to find US partners that can invest the sum needed to take care of exportation, venue rental, and communication.”
— Roei Amit, General Director, Grand Palais Immersif

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

TRENDS

Relevant trends to consider:

CONTENT

Edutainment. Education is positioned as the leading XR sector. Engaging content addressing contemporary issues such as social justice, sustainability, and mental health is in demand.

New audiences. Although exhibitions designed for all audiences guarantee possibilities, some audiences — such as young people — have not yet been reached. Artworks addressing neurodiversity should also be considered.

BUSINESS MODEL

Partnerships between different institutions — such as universities, museums, production studios, and LBE venues — are increasing. Examples in the US are *HOOKED: When Want Becomes Need*, a collaboration between Pullman Yards (venue) + King's College London + Emory University; and *Ramses the Great*, de Young Museum + Positron XR + Cityneon.

Marketing Strategy. Devices through which users can promote content on their social media and reach more audiences should be considered. Although media partners like Fever are increasing their relevance in LBE distribution, the power of word-of-mouth must not be underestimated.

FORMAT

Emergence of hybrid exhibits/NFT-Metaverse. New ways of achieving economic independence or legitimating the art scene are emerging because of the metaverse. Hybrid exhibitions are occurring, and digital museums are offering new possibilities.

Full dome productions. The demand for this format is expanding beyond traditional museums and planetariums into the entertainment sector.

HOW TO GET STARTED

We can confidently conclude that the French immersive industry has an excellent opportunity to enter the US market given its high-quality content, strong "France" brand, the attention it gets among US audiences, and the need for in-person experiences after COVID.

For French creators and museums, this presents an opportunity to increase their revenue and boost their reputation to travel to more international markets in the future. Nevertheless, because it is a different market with a different culture, here are a few recommendations for French producers and museums wanting to get started in the smoothest way possible:

Understand the market.

This is the first step to understanding the unique characteristics of the new market. This study is a great starting point, but another relevant recommendation would be to dive deeper into the market of the specific project you want to develop. Some ideas are:

- See what others have done. Look for companies or projects like yours. Look also for where they were promoted and exhibited, which business model they used, what worked well, what could be improved, etc.
- Look for online reviews of their audiences (you can use Google reviews, forums, or magazines).
- Get in touch with those who supported you to introduce your project and ask for feedback.

Adapt the marketing campaign to the US market.

Because it is a different market, we need to understand the key selling points for US audiences and adapt the marketing campaign accordingly. For example, in France, an immersive dance experience may be generally well received, while in the US, the most relevant component might be an interracial love story within the dance experience. Here are two more tips:

- Cultural relevancy: We need to understand what topics are currently culturally relevant in the market we are trying to access and where our story will best fit. That will help us redesign the marketing strategy and find key partners we'll study later.
- Create transmedia content: Another great marketing strategy (though this one is more general) is to build small pieces of content in different media to spread the word about our story's universe.

Build a reputation.
This step is crucial when trying to access a new market, and French creators already have a competitive advantage because French culture is well-regarded in the US. Some tips for that point would be:

- Highlight your past exhibitions and festival awards or presence. French and European festivals are very well-regarded in the US. Help your potential client build your "selling point" by emphasizing your past work.
- Share your work at festivals locally: Besides all the festivals where you have already exhibited, look for relevant festivals in the area where you want to exhibit, and find interesting ones where you could showcase your work. This could create excellent marketing opportunities. Besides festivals, you could also think about institutions where you could facilitate workshops or talks related to your piece's topic.

Build an international network:
Contacts are vital in any industry, but especially in this one. Therefore, it is crucial to network. In that sense, it is recommended that you do the following:

- In person: Attend events where people can become familiar with your work, meet you, learn about your future projects, your skills, your style, etc.
- Online: Use social networks (mainly LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram) to explain your project.

One type of content that is very popular is "work in progress," where people can see how a project is brought to life and how you create impact along the way.

Be creative with your business model and develop a strong value proposition.
Think outside of the box about possible ways to monetize your work: it may be a company whose marketing strategy resonates with your mission or your piece's topic that is willing to pay for your project to be exhibited. Or it may be a scientific institution interested in decoding a concept related to your project's theme, etc. Bear in mind that the US is a private market, and while that makes it more difficult in some cases, it also offers many new opportunities.

Find allies (related to points 2 and 5).
Related to the point above, one important exercise is to identify who could be your potential allies in terms of marketing, knowledge, and finance:
Marketing: those who can help you spread the word about your project
Knowledge: those who can bring reputation and solid knowledge to the theme of your piece
Finance: those who can potentially pay for your project

Try to think of those allies as a triangle. Once you find two of them, you will likely find the third one.

Be bold and resilient, and stick to your vision.

You may face substantial rejections even if you follow all the steps above. You must be ready to be resilient and try again often. Don't be discouraged or afraid of rejections. Learn from them and try again.

"They could do an NFT Prerelease/small video sample of their VR content (a 3D model of the assets) and try to do a pre-sale of their work on their own or while in the festival. There are no rules about that."
— Julie Walsh, Curator

CREDITS

IMMERSIVE SPACES
A Key Study to Envision French Immersive Content in the US, 2023

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Garage Stories
Innovation lab focused on emerging media based in Barcelona and New York City.

Author, Research Lead, and Interviews
Marta Ordeig
Marina Frean

Content Editor
Marta Ordeig
Marina Frean

Art Direction & Graphic Design
Nadia Coen

Proofreader
Rachelle AuCoin

French Embassy / Villa Albertine New York
Valerie Mouroux
Director of Film, TV, & New Media

Camille Jeanjean New Media Officer
(camille.jeanjean@villa-albertine.org)

Heloise Garry
Intern

François Bridey
Director of Museums and Cultural Heritage
(francois.bridey@villa-albertine.org)

CONTRIBUTORS (38)

We would like to thank all the professionals who shared their time and experience with us and contributed to this study.

FR CONTRIBUTORS (24)

Line Abramatic-Brucena
Producer, Gengiskhan

Roei Amit
Directeur Général, Grand Palais Immersif

Abla Benmiloud-Faucher
Head of Digital, Centre des Monuments Nationaux

Margherita Bergamo Meneghini
Producer and Choreographer, Compagnie Voix

Juliette Buffard Scalabre
Head of Communications & Art Development, Superbien

Louis Cacciuttolo
CEO, Perpetual Emotion

Pierre Cattan
Creative Producer & CEO, Small Bang

Paul Chaine
Communications Manager, Palace of Versailles

Julien Dubuc
for Collectif INVIVO, Artist

Pierre Friquet (PYARé)
XR Creator, PYARé studio

Laetitia Germain-Thomas
General Manager, PXN Association

Cedric Huchet
Media Art Artistic Director, Stereolux/ Scopitone Festival

Antoine Immarigeon
Innovation Project Manager, Centre Pompidou

Rémi Large
Producer, Tamanoir

Etienne Li
Producer, Blanca Li Company

Raphaël Lemée
Head of Marketing and Sales, Emissive

Paul Mezier
Executive Producer, Novelab

Mathieu Pradat
Author and Director, La prairie productions

Maxime Perret-Cortassa
International Marketing and Sales, Emissive

Alexandre Roux
Head of Distribution, Lucid Realities/Unframed Collection

Ornella Salloum
Producer, AΦE

Michael Swierczynski
Director of Innovation and XR, Partouche Studio

Stéphanie Targui
Digital and Audiovisual Innovation Manager, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle

Agata Di Tommaso
Festivals Manager, Diversion Cinema

US CONTRIBUTORS (14)

Amir Berenjian
CEO, REM5 Virtual Reality Laboratory

Kevin Cunningham
Artistic Director/Creative Director, 3LD

William Ferraro
CEO, Key to Amaze

Julie Ganas
Curator of Engagement and Digital Initiatives, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art

Tammy Greenman
Co-Founder/Director of Strategic Creativity, Factory Obscura/Mix-Tape

Eric Jaenike
President, Prismajic

Mark Kleback
Co-Owner, Wonderville

Steve Kopelman
CEO & Founder, Seismique

Cynthia Noble
Executive Director, Art on theMART

Ronen Olshansky
Strategic Advisor, POSITRON

Jacob Rosenberg
Marketing Director, Escape Virtuality

Corrie Siegel
Executive Director, Museum of Neon Art

Leo Tsimmer
CEO, VR World NYC

Julie Walsh
Artist & Curator/Art Consortium